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AUTHOR Yildirim, Ali
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ABSTRACT

This study is part of a larger research project designed to investigate social studies teaching at middle and high school levels in Turkey. This paper assesses curriculum implementation in social studies courses at middle school level from the perspectives of teachers and students. The study design included 88 middle schools in 22 provinces representing the seven geographic regions in Turkey. Social studies teachers of history, geography, and civics in all of the schools at all three grade levels were asked to participate and a stratified random sample of students were selected to represent all grade levels and courses. Two separate questionnaires were designed for the two groups to explore their perceptions of the teaching and learning process in social studies courses. Results are organized under three parts: (1) teachers' perceptions of the curriculum guidelines they use; (2) teachers' and students' assessments of the teaching and learning process in social studies courses in terms of teaching/learning activities, instructional materials, types of assignments and evaluation methods used; and (3) the impact of social studies courses on students from their point of view. (EH)

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Teaching and Learning in Middle School Social Studies in Turkey: An Analysis of Curriculum Implementation

Dr. Ali Yıldırım
Middle East Technical University
Faculty of Education
Department of Educational Sciences
06531 Ankara, TURKEY
TEL: 90-312-210-4042 (B)
90-312-240-5417 (H)
FAX: 90-312-210-1254
e-mail: A12268@tutor.fedu.metu.edu.tr

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Ali Yildirim

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Teaching and Learning in Middle School Social Studies in Turkey: An Analysis of Curriculum Implementation

Introduction

This study is part of a larger research project designed to investigate social studies teaching at middle and high school level in Turkey. The purpose of this paper specifically is to assess curriculum implementation in social studies courses at middle school level from the perspectives of teachers and students.

Social studies is an important part of general education especially in their function in contributing to educating democratic citizens. "The democratic citizen is not to be understood merely in the classic 'good citizenship' sense of one who is patriotic, loyal, and obedient to the state; rather the good citizen is also a critic of the state, one who is able and willing to participate in its improvement" (Engle & Ochoa, 1988, p.3). In this sense, social studies for middle school students is especially critical because they begin to form their own values, life views, and modes of living during that period. In addition, "social studies is the study of people and their interactions with one another. It focuses directly on human events and human behavior" (Ellis et al., 1991, p. 5). So the challenge for social studies teaching at this level is to reach a reasonable accommodation between socialization of youth and the development of their critical capabilities. To achieve this goal successfully, social studies curriculum should include topics that engage students' interests, respond to their needs in daily life and develop their perspectives in thinking about social issues. In addition, "learning activities should be varied because of the short attention span of students; they should include both physical and social involvement, such as role playing and simulations, and should involve both inquiry and didactic teaching and learning" (Hartoonian and Laughlin, 1989, p. 395).

Social studies are organized separately around three academic disciplines, History, Geography and Civics, in middle schools in Turkey. History is taught for three years (grades 6-8) while Geography for two (grades 6 and 7) and Civics for one (grade 8). There is no specific program training Civics teachers; Civics is a minor for Geography and History teachers. However, in practice, since the teaching load is heavy for History teachers, Geography teachers generally are given the responsibility to teach Civics.

Until 1984, an integrated approach was used in designing the curriculum and teaching in social studies in middle schools. However, in 1984, the Ministry of Education adapted a separate organization for social studies courses because of the belief that it allowed a rigorous and intellectually demanding focus during instruction. This approach has allowed the strict control of

the process and contents of subject matter, and textbooks have served as the major element of structure in curriculum (Yildirim, 1994).

The curriculum for any social studies course in all primary and secondary schools in Turkey is prepared and approved by the Ministry of National Education (MONE). All teachers have to use the centrally designed curriculum in their respective area. Their course plans and implementation in the classroom are checked on a regular basis each academic year by the MONE inspectors to oversee the teachers' compliance with the standard curriculum. Although the curriculum guidelines vary in terms of their length, detail and approach, any curriculum includes at least the goals and objectives of the course and the list of units and topics to be taught. The standardized curriculum has an immense impact on teaching practices since it controls the scope and sequence, and does not allow much flexibility to the teacher. In the past few years, there have been intensive discussions at the MONE level on relaxing this strict control over the course curricula to allow more teacher flexibility, adaptation, input and creativity in practice, but it appears that it is unlikely to put this idea into practice in the near future.

The goals of social studies instruction fall into four categories: knowledge, skills, values and participation (Ellis et al., 1991). All these goals are more or less evident in the curriculum guidelines for all three social studies courses. In addition, the guidelines recommend the use of various instructional materials and strategies to involve students in their learning more actively (Ministry of Education, 1984). However, it remains unclear to what degree social studies teaching leads to achieving the main goals stated above. It is also unclear that how the curriculum is perceived and actualized by both teachers and students. Despite a long standing commitment to social studies education in middle schools in Turkey, relatively few researchers have examined the substance of classroom life, teachers' and students' experiences, and the outcomes of actual curriculum implementation for students. In this sense, the perceptions of teachers and students in social studies courses might be important in understanding the social studies teaching and learning process, and their possible impact on students.

Methods

The study design included 88 middle schools in 22 provinces representing the seven geographic regions in Turkey. The main data sources were History, Geography and Civics (referred as social studies hereafter) teachers and students who were taking any of these courses at all three grade levels. While all social studies teachers in the selected schools were asked to participate in the study, a stratified random sampling technique was used to select students representing all grade levels and different social studies courses.

Two separate questionnaires were designed for these two groups to explore their perceptions of the teaching and learning process in social studies courses. The teacher

questionnaire had two closely parallel versions: One asked the History teachers to evaluate History courses while the other asked the Geography teachers to evaluate Geography and Civics courses together since Geography teachers generally taught Civics, too. Student questionnaire had six parallel versions designed for each social studies course at each grade level, asking students to evaluate a specific social studies course they were taking.

The questionnaires included both open- and close-ended questions on the quality of the curriculum guideline, the degree of success in achieving curriculum goals through teaching, the perceptions on course objectives, content, materials and instructional and evaluation procedures, the impact of social studies on students, the effectiveness of organization of social studies as separate courses, etc.

The questionnaires were mailed to one social studies teacher in each sampled school. This person administered both teacher and student questionnaires and sent them back to the researcher. As a result, a total of 262 teacher and 1203 student questionnaires were secured for analysis.

The study sample represented both History and Geography teachers almost equally (49% and 51% respectively). Teachers formed three main groups in terms of their field of study during their preservice education programs. More than one third (36%) studied Geography; 33% Social Studies and 27% History. A minority (4%) were educated in other areas like Theology, Mathematics and Geology but somehow hired to teach social studies courses as a result of lack of sufficient number of subject specific teachers trained in certain years. Since History, Geography and Civics courses were taught together under Social Studies until 1984, there were departments training social studies teachers before that year. Later, these departments were converted to subject specific programs like History or Geography. As a result, it has become a reality of the middle schools in Turkey to have both social studies and subject specific teachers under the same roof teaching similar courses.

Both female and male teachers were almost equally represented in the study (51% and 49% respectively). More than half of the teachers had 11-20 years of teaching experience (59%) while 21% had 1-10 years and 20% more than 20 years of teaching experience. The majority of the teachers (67%) had a four year undergraduate degree in a subject area while close to one third (30%) graduated from a three year teacher training institute. Only few (3%) had master's or doctoral degrees. More than four-fifths of the teachers (81%) taught more than 25 hours per week, indicating the heavy teaching load on a typical middle school teacher. Of those, 55% indicated more than 30 hours of teaching load per week. The number of students in a class also influences the quality of teaching and learning process to a certain degree. Close to two thirds of the teachers (64%) had more than 40 students in their class while 28% had between 31-40 and only 8% had less than 31 students.

The student sample represented different social studies subject areas: History covering all three middle school grades were represented by 610 students, Geography covering 6th and 7th grades by 418 and Civics at the 8th grade by 175. Of the whole student sample, 47% were female and 53% male. In terms of the education level of students' parents, the mothers had an average of primary and the fathers had an average of middle school education.

Descriptive (mainly percentages and means) and inferential statistics were used to analyze the data collected through close-ended questions. Both separate and combined analyses were conducted on teacher and student questionnaires by subject area to see whether there were subject specific differences in their responses. The responses to the questions were more or less consistent across all social studies subject areas, therefore, combined analyses were used to reach the results for this paper. In addition, t-test and ANOVA were used to analyze the differences in the responses based on certain background variables, and the results indicated that most of the background variables did not cause any significant difference in the subjects' perceptions. Thematic categories were established to analyze the open-ended data. In this process, a sample of questionnaires (approximately 30 from each group) were selected randomly, and responses were categorized according to the main themes identified. Then all open-ended data were coded and analyzed according to these categories.

Results

Results are organized under three parts. First, teachers' perceptions of the curriculum guidelines they use in teaching History, Geography and/or Civics are examined. Then, both teachers' and students' assessment of the teaching and learning process in social studies courses in terms of teaching/learning activities, instructional materials, types of assignments and evaluation methods used are presented. Finally, the impact of social studies courses on students from their point of view is investigated.

Teachers' Perceptions of Curriculum Guideline

As mentioned above, instruction in Turkish primary and secondary schools is greatly affected by the centralized curriculum design at and inspection by the Ministry of National Education (MONE). Every teacher is supposed to follow the standardized curriculum guideline at both planning and instruction stages. Recent curriculum guidelines produced by the MONE allow a certain level of flexibility in determining the content, method and evaluation of instruction in order to meet the contextual needs and give tho teacher a certain level of freedom in creating an effective teaching and learning environment.

In the first section of the questionnaire, teachers were asked to evaluate the course curriculum guideline prepared by the MONE in terms of its contribution to determining the scope and sequence, preparing yearly and unit plans, choosing appropriate teaching strategies, course related materials and evaluation strategies. Table 1 presents their responses.

Table 1. Impact of Curriculum Guideline on Teacher Planning and Instructional Activities

ACTIVITIES	VH (5)	H (4)	SH (3)	LH (2)	NH (1)	MEAN	N
Determining the topics to be taught	35.6	23.5	30.0	2.8	8.1	**3.76**	247
Deciding on the sequence of the topics	37.1	22.9	29.0	2.9	8.2	**3.78**	245
Preparing yearly plans	49.2	26.6	20.1	1.6	2.5	**4.19**	244
Preparing unit plans	30.6	20.9	29.1	4.6	14.8	**3.48**	196
Choosing/using appropriate teaching strategies	-	6.6	35.8	32.1	25.5	**2.24**	243
Choosing/using course-related materials	.8	3.3	41.0	28.3	26.6	**2.23**	244
Choosing/using evaluation strategies	1.2	2.0	46.1	31.0	19.6	**2.34**	245

VH=Very Helpful, H=Helpful, SH=Somewhat Helpful, LH=Of Little Help, NH=Not Helpful.
In this table and the following ones, the data are presented in percentages and means, and N's for each item vary due to missing responses.

The responses indicate that the teachers find the curriculum guideline prepared centrally helpful in certain respects but not very helpful in others. The guideline appears to be assisting the teacher in determining the course topics to be taught and their sequence at a certain grade level. The curriculum guideline is found most helpful in preparing the yearly plans which every teacher must do and get it approved by the school principal at the beginning of the academic year. The teachers also receive a good amount of help from the guideline in preparing unit plans but not as much as the yearly plans. One reason might be that the curriculum guideline usually is not very detailed in terms of objectives and classroom activities which must be included in every unit plan to a certain detail. Therefore, the teacher may not depend on the guideline entirely in preparing the unit plans.

The respondents find the curriculum less helpful in choosing and using appropriate teaching strategies, course-related materials and evaluation strategies. These results indicate that the curriculum guideline draws the boundaries of the instruction in terms of the scope and sequence, but does not contribute much to classroom activities. This has been the traditional approach to centrally guided teaching. The content is controlled strictly in terms of what will be taught and in what sequence, and how much time will be spent on each topic. However, the questions of how this content is taught, what kinds of support materials should be used and how,

and how student learning of the content should be evaluated are not dealt in the curriculum guideline to the degree that they assist the teacher in increasing the quality of teaching.

With regard to the use of curriculum guideline the teachers were also asked how flexible it is in carrying out the same activities mentioned above. The results are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Flexibility Provided by Curriculum Guideline in Teacher Planning and Instructional Activities

ACTIVITIES	VF (5)	F (4)	SF (3)	LF (2)	NF (1)	**MEAN**	N
Determining the topics to be taught	-	2.1	47.1	21.4	29.4	**2.22**	238
Deciding on the sequence of the topics	1.2	10.2	56.6	18.3	13.6	**2.67**	235
Preparing yearly plans	.4	10.1	42.8	29.6	17.0	**2.49**	229
Preparing unit plans	1.6	14.3	39.0	23.1	22.0	**2.51**	182
Choosing/using appropriate teaching strategies	14.0	24.2	39.0	7.2	15.7	**3.14**	236
Choosing/using course-related materials	9.5	22.0	42.7	10.8	15.1	**3.00**	232
Choosing/using evaluation strategies	14.0	17.9	41.0	9.2	17.9	**3.01**	229

VF=Very Flexible, F=Flexible, SF=Somewhat Flexible, LF=Limited Flexibility, NF=Not Flexible.

Teachers find little flexibility in the curriculum guideline in determining the topics to be taught, deciding on the sequence of the topics, preparing yearly and unit plans. Particularly, flexibility is very limited in the selection of the topics. Teachers find a little more flexibility in doing the yearly and unit plans as well as determining the sequence. Flexibility is greater in the areas of teaching strategies, selection of course-related materials and determining evaluation strategies. These findings are in line with those discussed in Table 1. Since the curriculum guideline does not provide much help in these areas, teachers feel somewhat more flexible in deciding and using appropriate teaching activities, materials and evaluation methods. Furthermore, since the guideline strictly controls the determination of the topics and their sequence, it gives a limited flexibility to the teachers in these respects in addition to preparing yearly and unit plans.

Any curriculum has a certain emphasis in terms of content, skills, attitudes and other areas in teaching. Some curricula attempt to establish a balance among different purposes while others give priority to one or more of them and ignore others to a large degree. Within this context, teachers were asked to indicate the level of significance the curriculum guideline placed on different kinds of purposes. As summarized in Table 3, teachers perceive that the curriculum guideline mainly focuses on transmission of subject specific content, and all other purposes are attended to a lesser degree in the guideline. This perception may have important implications for instructional practices in the classroom. The teaching process may focus mainly on presenting knowledge and

asking it back in the exams, and ignore other important goals like developing positive attitudes toward the subject area, improving thinking, study/research skills, and social skills which we need to contribute to social life and lead a productive life. These are the areas almost any educational system emphasizes in its general education goals, however, they seem to be less stressed in the specific subject curriculum.

Table 3. Level of Significance Placed on Different Purposes by Curriculum Guideline

PURPOSES	VS (5)	S (4)	SS (3)	LS (2)	NS (1)	MEAN	N
Teaching of knowledge (e.g., facts, principles)	35.1	32.2	31.4	.8	.4	**4.01**	242
Developing positive attitude toward subject area	4.2	15.8	48.8	19.6	11.7	**2.81**	240
Promoting thinking skills (e.g., analysis)	1.2	16.2	52.7	16.2	13.7	**2.75**	241
Improving study and research skills	1.7	14.3	47.9	18.5	17.6	**2.64**	238
Developing social skills (e.g., participation)	2.1	13.2	42.3	16.7	25.6	**2.61**	234

VS=Very Significant, S=Significant, SS=Somewhat Significant, LS=Limited Significance, NS=Not Significant.

The balance among these areas is of special importance to social studies teaching because knowledge, skills, values and participation components work most effectively in helping the student socialize and develop critical capabilities at the same time. The level of attention these goals receive in the curriculum guideline is significant because it will probably influence what goes on in the classroom. In relation to this question, teachers were asked to what degree these purposes are promoted through classroom instruction. The curriculum guideline may not emphasize certain goals but the teachers themselves may somehow be able to address them through their teaching. Table 4 displays the responses of the teachers.

Table 4. Level of Promotion of Different Purposes Through Instruction

PURPOSES	HP (5)	P (4)	SP (3)	LP (2)	NP (1)	MEAN	N
Teaching of knowledge (e.g., facts, principles)	13.7	32.6	50.6	2.1	.9	**3.56**	233
Developing positive attitude toward subject area	4.3	16.0	53.7	18.6	7.4	**2.91**	231
Promoting thinking skills (e.g., analysis)	1.7	15.5	48.1	20.6	14.2	**2.70**	233
Improving study and research skills	1.7	11.3	54.5	18.2	14.3	**2.68**	231
Developing social skills (e.g., group work)	1.8	9.6	46.1	16.2	26.3	**2.44**	228

HP=Highly Promoted, P=Promoted, SP=Somewhat Promoted, LP=Little Promotion, NP=Not Promoted.

The responses indicate that knowledge transmission is achieved to a large degree while other goals like improving thinking skills, promoting study and research skills, developing positive attitude toward subject area and developing social skills are only addressed in a limited way. These responses are consistent with the curricular emphasis as discussed above. Teachers perceive that the curriculum guideline, by its heavy emphasis on content, does not leave much room for addressing other important goals. There may be several reasons for this result. Teachers may feel squeezed in terms of time by the topics listed in the curriculum, and they may not be able to find sufficient time to have discussion, group work, research projects and other activities which are likely to promote thinking, study, research, social skills and positive attitudes toward subject area.

Given these characteristics, it is important to understand how teachers perceive the overall adequacy of the curriculum guideline and the reasons for it. In response to a close-ended question, teachers say that the guideline is only somewhat adequate in assisting them in their teaching (Mean=1.97 on a scale where 1="not adequate at all," 2="somewhat adequate," and 3="quite adequate").

In response to a related open-ended question, teachers explain the deficiencies about the curriculum guidelines. Most of their complaints focus on the lack of assistance in teaching activities, materials and evaluation ideas and the inflexibility in choosing the topics and deciding about their sequence. They say they need more help from the curriculum guideline in planning their lessons, deciding on teaching strategies, materials and a certain level of assistance in measuring student achievement. In these respects, the curriculum is found to be very general and not practical. A number of teachers perceive that the topics in the curriculum are overloaded when the time they have to teach them is taken into consideration. Some teachers find problems in the curriculum in terms of the sequence of the topics since the current sequence is not very helpful in forming a meaningful whole. Others complain that the topics in the curriculum are not selected according to the interests of the students, resulting an undesired attitude on the part of the students toward the course in class. They suggest that the curriculum needs to be redesigned in order to better respond to the level of the students and the needs of the environmental characteristics of the individual school. In addition, the teachers prefer a certain level of flexibility in deciding on the topics and their sequence according to the student body they serve.

Teachers' and Students' Perceptions of Teaching and Learning Activities

A major challenge in social studies teaching is to provide a reasonable balance among promotion of knowledge, study and thinking skills, values and participation goals, and to use these goals in support of each other. In order to achieve that, the social studies teacher should vary learning activities to allow active student involvement in the learning process. Deductive approaches (like lecturing and recitation) should be balanced with inductive strategies (like

discussion, role playing) so that students develop both social and critical capabilities together. To explore what goes on in social studies classes in this respect, both teachers and students were asked to indicate the frequency of different teaching strategies they use/are exposed to in class. Table 5 presents teachers' and Table 6 presents students' responses to this question.

Table 5. Frequency of Different Teaching Strategies Used in Class (Teachers' Responses)

TEACHING STRATEGIES	VO (5)	O (4)	S (3)	R (2)	N (1)	**MEAN**	N
Lecturing	14.9	34.0	33.2	15.3	2.6	**3.43**	235
Question-answer (Recitation)	56.6	38.2	4.8	.4	-	**4.51**	249
Discussion	10.3	15.6	46.1	21.4	6.6	**3.02**	243
Group activity	5.0	8.6	35.3	31.2	20.0	**2.48**	221
Student presentation	16.6	25.1	38.3	17.0	3.0	**3.53**	235
Quiet reading from textbook	-	2.3	14.3	34.3	49.1	**1.70**	175
Role playing/Simulation	3.1	5.2	23.1	32.3	36.2	**2.07**	229

VO=Very Often, O=Often, S=Sometimes, R=Rarely, N=Never.

According to the teachers, the most frequent teaching strategy used is recitation through which the teacher asks students questions to check their understanding of the content. Student presentation is the second most frequent teaching strategy and lecturing is the third as reported by the teachers. It is interesting that student presentations are used frequently as a mode of teaching and learning. These findings are somewhat contrary to the assumption that lecturing is the most common mode of teaching in social studies. Teachers appear to rely heavily on recitation in their teaching while they also use lecturing and student presentations noticeably. Discussion is used sometimes, and the frequency for group activity is ranked somewhere between "sometimes" and "rarely," indicating that both strategies are not commonly used in class. Other activities like role playing/simulation and quiet reading from textbook are used rarely.

Table 6 presents students' perceptions of instructional activities in terms of their frequency. Students report that the most frequently used teaching strategy is lecturing, a point contrary to what the teachers report with regard to the same question. The second most frequently used teaching strategy is recitation followed by student presentation. Discussion and quiet reading are used sometimes while group activity and role playing/simulation are used only rarely.

Certain points students make with regard to the frequency of teaching activities they are exposed to in class are different from what teachers report. First of all, as mentioned above, the most common mode of instruction is lecturing according to the students while the teachers claim

that they use recitation most often in class. Second, discussion and group activity are not used as often as teachers report. Third, quite reading from textbook is used sometimes, according to students while teachers report that they use quite reading only rarely. The reasons for these differences are not very clear in the data. One possible explanation might be that the teachers do not want to report that activity since it implies that the teacher does not want to make an effort to teach in class but leave the responsibility to the student through quiet reading.

Table 6. Frequency of Different Teaching Strategies Used in Class (Students' Responses)

TEACHING STRATEGIES	VO (5)	O (4)	S (3)	R (2)	N (1)	**MEAN**	N
Lecturing	61.1	25.1	9.1	2.7	2.0	**4.41**	1191
Question-answer (Recitation)	31.8	30.9	27.8	6.3	3.2	**3.82**	1184
Discussion	8.3	14.4	35.9	20.2	21.2	**2.68**	1177
Group activity	11.2	7.6	16.1	12.5	52.6	**2.12**	1165
Student presentation	42.0	17.6	17.8	11.9	10.6	**3.69**	1173
Quiet reading from textbook	13.5	11.7	25.5	17.0	32.4	**2.57**	1173
Role playing/Simulation	7.4	7.5	15.4	15.3	54.5	**1.98**	1164

VO=Very Often, O=Often, S=Sometimes, R=Rarely, N=Never.

In addition to teaching strategies, the kinds of materials used in instruction are important to make social studies learning more active, meaningful and long-term. Traditionally, textbook is the most dominant instructional material used, however, the degree to which other supporting materials are used in class is unclear. To examine this issue, both teachers and students were asked to report on the frequency of use of course-related materials other than textbooks (Table 7).

Table 7. Use of Course-Related Support Materials (According to Teachers and Students)

	VO (5)	O (4)	S (3)	R (2)	N (1)	**MEAN**	N
How often are support materials used?							
Teachers	6.7	8.9	20.1	17.0	47.3	**2.11**	224
Students	7.8	4.6	6.8	7.6	73.2	**1.66**	1177
How often should support materials be used?							
Teachers	34.9	36.1	18.1	4.2	6.7	**3.88**	238
Students	38.8	17.1	14.3	22.0	7.8	**3.73**	1176

VO=Very Often, O=Often, S=Sometimes, R=Rarely, N=Never.

Both teachers and students report that the use of course-related materials other than textbooks in class is rare. This implies that the instructional activities are heavily dependent on the textbook. Although both groups fall in the range of "rarely" in terms of their ratings, students seem to experience the lack of use of instructional materials more often than their teachers. As the second part of Table 7 displays, both teachers and students claim that course-related materials should be used more often than they are presently. This indicates that both groups feel the need for additional course materials assuming that they will result in an increase in the quality of the teaching and learning process.

The kinds of assignments hold a special place in social studies teaching since they can contribute to various goals (e.g., thinking skills, participation) if used effectively. In order to understand how often certain types of assignments allowing different kinds of learning experiences are given to students in social studies courses, the assignments were grouped in three categories and teachers were asked to indicate how often they assigned them to their students (Table 8).

Table 8. Use of Different Types of Assignments in Terms of Frequency

ASSIGNMENTS	VO (5)	O (4)	S (3)	R (2)	N (1)	**MEAN**	N
Textbook-related assignments (e.g., reading, question answering)	33.6	39.8	12.3	7.8	6.6	**3.86**	244
Library-related assignments (e.g., newspaper search, literature review)	2.4	17.6	57.1	18.8	4.1	**2.96**	245
Field studies/projects (e.g., interview, observation)	.4	7.0	29.8	42.6	20.2	**2.49**	242

VO=Very Often, O=Often, S=Sometimes, R=Rarely, N=Never.

Teachers report that they mostly assign textbook-related homework like reading a chapter or section, and answering the end-of-chapter questions. While they give assignments from the textbook often, they assign library research assignments sometimes and field studies (e.g., observations and interviews) only rarely. In response to an open-ended question asking whether they assigned any other types of assignments to their students, a great majority do not report any while few mention other textbook-related activities like summarizing or writing questions on certain topics. Overall, assignments are mostly confined to textbook-related tasks, and other options are not given much priority. This heavy emphasis on textbook may help in promotion of content transmission, but may not be effective in reaching other significant purposes of social studies teaching.

Student evaluation is an important concern to teachers of all subject areas. However, it poses challenges particularly to social studies teachers. For example, while multiple choice type measurement instruments can be confidently used to measure success in many subject areas like Mathematics and certain sciences, they become problematic to a certain extent in social studies classes. First of all, there might be multiple realities in certain social studies content. Second, knowledge itself may be less important than what a student can do with it. Often it becomes important to measure higher levels of thinking rather than just knowledge and comprehension of certain content. Third, attitudes and social skills are among the important areas all social studies courses try to address. These and similar other features of social studies course make student evaluation a difficult and challenging task for the teacher.

Teachers were asked to indicate the frequency of certain evaluation strategies they use in their classes. The strategies were grouped in four categories: objective tests (e.g., multiple choice, true-false, matching), short answer tests (where knowledge and comprehension are measured through students' own statements of their understanding of content), essay tests (where the student is given more flexibility in forming their own responses and more opportunity to involve his/her own thoughts in responses), and finally oral exams (where the student answers teachers' questions -short answer mostly - orally in front of the whole class). Table 9 presents teachers' use of different types of evaluation strategies in terms of their frequency.

Table 9. Use of Different Types of Evaluation Strategies

EVALUATION STRATEGIES	VO (5)	O (4)	S (3)	R (2)	N (1)	**MEAN**	N
Objective tests (e.g., multiple choice, true-false, matching)	3.1	12.3	25.0	28.1	31.6	**2.27**	228
Short answer tests	68.8	27.9	2.0	.8	.4	**4.64**	247
Essay tests	1.4	7.2	14.0	24.4	52.9	**1.80**	221
Oral exams	30.7	23.7	11.4	14.9	19.3	**3.32**	228

VO=Very Often, O=Often, S=Sometimes, R=Rarely, N=Never.

Teachers report that they use short answer tests very often, oral exams sometimes and objective tests and essay tests only rarely. The preferences for using certain evaluation strategies more often than others are explained in teachers' responses to an open-ended question asking them to comment on the tests they use.

Teachers use short answer tests most frequently due to certain reasons. First, they are easy to prepare, administer and grade. Second, a short answer test can include many questions

covering a lot of topics students are exposed to. Third, objectivity can be established to a certain degree in grading them since the expected response is clear in most cases, making this type of test most realistic, effective and practical among others. Fourth, the questions in this type of test give the students an opportunity to use their comprehension skills in addition to reciting their knowledge. Fifth, teachers think that this type of test helps the students learn more effectively and remember what they learn for a long period of time. Finally, teachers believe that short answer test is the most appropriate measurement instrument for the middle school students. Objectives tests are not appropriate because the students are not used to answering multiple choice, true-false or matching questions. Students are not very successful in essay tests either because open-ended questions confuse them. So according to the majority of the teachers, the most appropriate way of testing student learning seems to be short-answer test.

Oral exams are also used often by teachers for several reasons. First, an oral exam seems to be an effective way of checking student understanding of the content through many short-answer questions. Second, it gives the student to improve his/her verbal ability in front of a group of people. Third, it encourages the student to study and learn more effectively. Fourth, oral exams presents effective learning opportunities for the students listening to the questions and responses. They see the kinds of questions asked and the kinds of answers acceptable. Finally, this type of exam helps the teacher to establish a dialog with the individual student.

Teachers find objective tests realistic and objective, and useful in covering a lot of topics in one exam. However, many teachers find it difficult to prepare objective tests of good quality (e.g., writing objective items). Some teachers admit that they have no experience and skill in preparing and administering an objective test. In addition, they think that through objective tests only certain types of questions (mainly questions requiring memorization of knowledge) can be asked, and for some teachers who would like go beyond that in evaluating student success, this is a major weakness. As a result, they avoid using them often in their evaluations of students.

The essay test appears to be the least frequently used evaluation instrument. The main reason is the difficulty the teachers go through in grading open-ended questions in terms of time, effort and objectivity. Teachers say essay tests take more time to grade than other types of instruments. In addition, essay tests require much effort by the teacher making grading difficult and tiresome. Finally, essay tests allow students to write different type of responses for the same question, and this makes objective grading difficult. Few teachers mention about the difficulty in adjusting the level of essay questions to the level of students and the low level of success students have in these types of exams.

On evaluation of student success, teachers were asked how satisfied they were overall with the evaluation strategies they used. Teachers report that they are only somewhat satisfied with the strategies they use (Mean=2.22 on scale where 1="not satisfied at all," 2="somewhat satisfied"

and 3="satisfied"). The main reasons for their dissatisfaction with the evaluation strategies are related to their lack of knowledge and experience in different types of testing strategies, lack of time to work on preparing good quality tests, the inadequacy of different types of tests they have to use, the overall testing system in the school system and other contextual circumstances such as crowded classrooms. Some teachers believe that no test can measure the real success of the student since each student is different, and it is hard for teachers to carry out individualized assessment. Others complain about the size of their classroom population saying that "it is very difficult to measure student achievement fairly in a class of 65 students whatever technique you use." A number of teachers liken the school system to a horse racing arena where "students study only to pass the grade, memorize to be successful in the exam, but not to learn." Finally, the teachers complain that they are not free in student evaluation. They say that inspectors put a pressure on them to use certain types of exams like short answer and oral exam while not to consider others. However, some teachers would like to try out other types of exams to see their adequacy in measuring student learning.

In relation to evaluation of student achievement, students were asked whether the exams were adequate in measuring their success in the social studies courses. Close to two-thirds (63%) find the types of exams adequate while a little more than one-third (38%) say the exams are not sufficient in measuring their real success in these courses. The data indicates that dissatisfaction with the evaluation increases at upper grades (7th and 8th). While only 29% at the 6th grade find evaluation inadequate, 39% at the 7th and 45% at the 8th grade do so. Other variables such as gender, and the course students take do not create significant differences in students' perceptions about the exams.

Those who do not find exams adequate state that test anxiety, types of questions, heavy requirements, dislike in studying for the exam cause problems for them in reflecting their real performance in exams. First, a large number of students say that they feel nervous in the exam resulting in difficulty in remembering what they know. Second, short answer questions are heavily dependent on memorization which they find difficult to do. Third, they are expected to remember a large body of knowledge in exams, and this makes studying for the exam boring and an unpleasant experience.

Finally, teachers were asked whether social studies should be taught together in a combined course or they should be kept as separate courses as they are presently. The majority of the teachers (83%) suggest that these courses should be taught separately while only a minority (17%) believe that they should be taught together. There were no significant differences in the responses to this question among the teachers in terms of gender, experience and the course they teach.

Those who vote for separate organization of the social studies courses claim that the subject areas are different from each other to a certain extent, and teaching them together confuses students

and demotivates them. Since these areas are based on distinct disciplines, they deserve separate attention in terms of time and effort spent teaching them. Separate organization is found more practical in terms of planning and teaching as well as evaluating student success. Students can learn the topics and comprehend the concepts more easily, and feel more comfortable in studying them. In addition, when these subject areas are taught separately, more detail in topics can be covered so that more thorough knowledge can be transmitted to the students, and the teaching would be more rigorous. Furthermore, many teachers say that they were trained in only one or two areas of social studies, and they do not feel competent enough to teach the topics of the other areas within the same course. They see this kind of specialization useful since it allows more in-depth competence in the subject areas. Finally, some teachers say that even within separate organizations, the topics can be taught in relation to each other, and students can be helped to transfer what they learn to other areas.

On the other hand, the teachers claiming that social studies should be organized as one course argue that these subject areas have many things in common. First of all, they all concern the human being in different ways. Second, the knowledge, principles, concepts and ideas in all these areas complement each other. Students can learn and apply the content in these areas in a meaningful way since they together contribute to the process of acquisition of the ideas and concepts. Teachers point to the interdisciplinary aspect of education in middle schools and find meaningful and relevant learning more significant than acquiring in-depth knowledge in separate disciplines. They say that separate organization results in deficiency in certain areas like Civics since its topics are not taught at all in 6th and 7th grades. In addition, the details become the focus of separate subject areas, and this creates confusion and boredom among students. Furthermore, the combined approach can help the teacher in deciding about the most appropriate strategies to bring together these subjects areas to form a meaningful whole in the student's mind. Finally, some teachers say that students should learn how to bring together what they learn in different courses, and social studies can serve an important function in this respect by showing students how topics of different courses are interrelated and relevant in solving a problem or thinking about an issue.

Impact of Social Studies Courses on Students

Impact of any course on students in terms of knowledge, skills, attitudes and other aspects is important to consider in assessing the overall effectiveness of curriculum implementation. Social studies courses are expected to have a certain amount of influence on students with regard to certain goal areas. To investigate this questions, students were asked what impact the social studies courses had on them and to what degree. The responses are presented in Table 10.

Table 10. Impact of Social Studies Courses on Students

STATEMENTS	A (3)	SA (2)	D (1)	MEAN	N
This course is important.	73.7	22.5	3.8	**2.70**	1179
What I learn in this course will be useful in to me my daily life.	73.8	19.7	6.4	**2.67**	1181
I like doing the assignments given in this course.	59.4	30.6	10.0	**2.50**	1183
I understand and learn topics of this course without much difficulty.	54.4	38.1	7.5	**2.47**	1182
This course helps me develop new perspectives in this area.	48.4	41.7	9.9	**2.39**	1181
This course helps me improve my thinking skills (e.g., analysis).	49.1	40.4	10.5	**2.39**	1179
My interest in this course has increased in the last few months.	51.7	36.0	12.3	**2.39**	1179
This course improves my reading skills.	47.2	36.2	16.6	**2.31**	1176
This course improves my interest in reading.	44.5	39.7	15.8	**2.29**	1175
This course helps me improve my discussion and questioning skills.	44.2	39.5	16.4	**2.28**	1180
This course improves my interest in writing.	19.9	38.8	41.3	**1.79**	1178
This course improves my writing skills.	19.0	38.0	43.0	**1.76**	1182

A=Agree, SA=Somewhat Agree, D=Disagree.

Students find the social studies course they take important, and expect that the content will be useful in their daily life. In addition to the importance attached to these courses, students like doing course-related assignments, and report that they do not find the topics difficult to learn and understand. Although not as highly rated as the above, students think that the social studies course they take helps them develop new perspectives in the subject area, improve their thinking skills like analysis and synthesis, and develop positive attitudes toward the subject area. The data further indicate that the social studies courses are somewhat helpful in improving students reading skills, their interest in reading, and their discussion and questioning skills. Finally, the impact of social studies courses on improving students' writing skills and their interest in writing is less apparent in the data. The analyses do not show any significant differences in students' perceptions of impact of the social studies courses in terms of the specific course they take, their gender and grade level.

These results indicate that students do not take social studies courses lightly. They place a certain degree of importance on them, and enjoy learning and doing assignments in these courses. They have a positive perspective in terms of the usefulness of these courses in their daily life and the degree of difficulty in learning the course related material. Students perceive some impact on their thinking skills, perspectives and attitudes toward social studies courses. Although the impact is not heavily present in other areas like questioning and discussion skills, and reading and writing, students perceive positive influences in these areas as well. Overall, these perceptions can be considered as very positive when the routinized curriculum implementation dependent on lecturing

and recitation, textbook-bound assignments and evaluation is taken into account. It seems that students at the middle school level present a good base for effective teaching of social studies courses in terms of their attitude toward these courses, the skills they develop and the importance and interest they attach to the teaching and learning process.

Discussion

In a centralized system of education, the impact of the centrally prepared and controlled curriculum guideline on instruction and its results will naturally be extensive. First of all, this kind of curriculum may be perceived as a rigid prescription for instruction, and teachers may feel a necessity to follow it thoroughly. Second, whatever the curriculum emphasizes will be reflected in classroom instruction to a certain degree. The results of this study indicate that the curriculum guidelines prepared by the MONE assist teachers in selection of the topics to be taught and their sequence in all social studies courses in middle schools. Teachers actually follow the guidelines in preparing yearly and unit plans for instruction even though they find the guidelines somewhat less helpful in unit plans. This assistance by the curriculum guidelines appears to be very strict, that is, the curriculum guidelines do not leave much room for flexibility to the individual teacher in the above respects. However, teachers find more flexibility in the guidelines in terms of determining their instructional methods, materials and evaluation strategies they will use in their class because the guidelines do not offer much help to the teachers in these respects. Teachers are not happy about the deficiencies of the guidelines in terms of teaching activities, materials and evaluation strategies, and suggest that the guidelines should provide them with ideas, suggestions and directions that they can utilize in class in these respects. As a result, the content is determined by the standardized curriculum guidelines whereas how the content is delivered and how the delivery is measured are left to the teacher.

Social studies instruction should not only focus on transmission of knowledge since the knowledge itself is not very important unless it causes some skill and attitude development in individuals. Developing thinking, studying, research, social skills and positive attitudes are also among the significant goals of social studies. The teachers this study reached perceive that the standard MONE curriculum focuses mostly on transmission of knowledge while other significant goals are emphasized to a lesser degree. As a result, transmission of knowledge becomes the priority, and other areas are not given sufficient attention in classroom instruction.

The classroom activities carry a special importance for social studies teaching. A History or Geography lesson can easily be a boring and undesired experience through a straightforward lecture without involving students actively in their learning. At the same time the same social studies content can be delivered in a lively atmosphere where students are somehow involved in their knowledge and idea building process. Therefore, it is important how the classroom activities

are organized and what role students and the teacher have in this organization. The results in the study show that the most common approach to classroom instruction is recitation and lecturing followed by student presentation. Students either read from a textbook or listen to the teacher's lecture, learn the knowledge and recite orally in class. This approach is consistently used to some degree by the classroom teachers in all social studies courses. The instructional approaches which allow more student involvement in learning like discussion, group activity and role playing are only used rarely. This result indicates that the teaching in social studies classes is mainly teacher-centered, and students remain passive in the learning process most of the time. In addition, the use of materials other than the course textbook is very limited even though both teachers and students prefer to have different kinds of course-related materials in the teaching and learning process.

Textbook-related activity (e.g., reading, answering questions) is the common mode of homework assignment given to the students. Library-related assignments (e.g., newspaper search) are used by the teachers sometimes while field studies (e.g., interviews, observations) are only assigned rarely. Again, the common mode of assignments indicate that out of class activities the teachers assign to the students are mostly dependent on the course textbook.

Short-answer test and oral exams are the most common mode of student evaluation in social studies classes. Teachers find both strategies easy to use, objective and appropriate to the student population in their classes. Particularly short-answer tests help the teacher cover many topics in a single exam, and students feel comfortable in answering the short answer questions. Objective tests (e.g., multiple choice, true-false) and essay tests are only used rarely since they are perceived as difficult to prepare and grade, and inappropriate for the age group the teachers serve. A quite large number of teachers reflect their dissatisfaction with the exams they use since they feel unequipped with new and alternative measurement and evaluation strategies. The crowded classrooms, insufficient time and support by administrators, and the rigid testing system for entrance to special high schools and universities appear to be the other main problems for their dissatisfaction. Supporting teachers' perspectives, a number of students also complain that the exams they are exposed to are not sufficient to measure their real success in the social studies course they take, and this perception is more apparent among students in upper middle school grades. As a result, measurement appears to be a significant issue to deal with in improving the social studies teaching.

On the organization of social studies courses, the majority of the teachers suggest that the current structure which organizes social studies courses separately should stay as it is. They justify their recommendation by their educational background since they feel inadequate in other areas of social studies as well as with the belief that separate organization allows more effective teaching, and students learn the course content more easily this way. On the other hand, the

minority advocating an integrated approach contend that teaching around concepts can cause more meaningful learning, and create a more active learning environment in the classroom.

The above perceptions of the teachers on different aspects of social studies teaching in middle schools are more or less similar across specific subject areas. In addition, the differences in the perceptions are not significant in terms of subjects' gender, teaching experience, educational level, teaching load and the number of students in class. This indicates that social studies teaching does not differ to a great degree in these respects. The curriculum implementation is pretty much routinized in different types of classrooms by different teachers.

It is interesting to note that although the teaching and learning process appears to be routine and dependent on lecturing and recitation heavily, and the textbook is used as the main medium of instruction, students perceive a good amount of positive impact of these courses on certain skills, attitudes and perspectives they have. They attach a good amount of significance to these courses, view the knowledge they learn as useful and enjoy doing course-related assignments. In addition, students' understanding, perspectives, thinking skills and interest seem to be impacted positively by these courses to some degree. Although less apparent, the positive influence is also seen on their questioning/discussion and reading skills. These results show that students are positive about social studies courses and the outcomes they individually draw from them.

Studying teaching and learning process in social studies courses in middle schools is important from several perspectives. First of all, there has been a common dissatisfaction with all social studies courses in middle schools among both students and teachers. There have been varied explanations for this dissatisfaction by the Ministry of National Education mainly focusing on old textbooks and crowded classrooms. This study uncovers some of the realities of the curriculum implementation process from the perspectives of teachers and students, which may help to find ways to improve both the curriculum and its implementation. Furthermore, this study shows the importance of receiving feedback from teachers and students, those who experience the curriculum directly, and taking into account their perspectives in designing curriculum and improving the implementation process rather than just depending on inspectors' evaluations of teachers' performance and records of student achievement.

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